Philosophy of Art
Philosophy 227a/b, Fall 2010
W/F: a) 9:30-10:50; b) 2:40-4:00
Office Hours, W 11:30-3:00
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Course Description: What is Art? What makes a photograph on the wall at the Museum of Modern Art different from the one on the front page of the Daily News? What makes a landscape painting more (or less!) interesting than a snapshot? Our commonsense understanding of art tells us that artworks are in some way special. Art is often beautiful. It is sometimes provocative and controversial. But it is notoriously difficult to identify just what it is that makes artworks unique. In fact, it is sometimes difficult to understand why particular artworks are considered special at all. Philosophy of Art is a branch of philosophy concerned with answers to just these types of questions. In this course we will examine four broad issues that have defined philosophical aesthetics: What is the relationship between art and representation? What does it mean to say that an artwork expresses an emotion? What role does the formal structure of artworks play in explanations of art? What is an aesthetic experience, and what role, if any, does our knowledge of a culture play in shaping these experiences? We will also discuss a range of philosophical issues associated with particular art forms. Finally, despite disagreements about the nature of art most would agree that art must be experienced to be understood. Therefore, throughout the course we will both make art and look at particular artworks as illustrations of the views discussed.

Course Goals: The aim of this course is to 1) introduce students to philosophical aesthetics by 2) working through some its foundational works and some contemporary problems. Our approach will be both historical and topical. Philosophy is a living art. Along the way the student will be introduced to characteristic philosophical methods. These methods are designed to help one think clearly and critically about arguments in general, and are indispensable philosophical tools.

Requirements: You will be asked to write two short, 3-page papers on assigned topics, one early in the semester and another before Thanksgiving. The average of these papers will be worth 30% of your final grade. You will also be asked to write a 6-page mid-term paper on an assigned topic worth 30% of your final grade, and an 8-10 page final paper worth 40% of your final grade. The goal of these assignments is to encourage the student to think through the problems of aesthetics and the philosophy of art on their own.

Attendance: CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION IS A REQUIREMENT (an additional +/-10% of your final grade). Therefore, excessive absence will affect a student's final grade.

Required Texts:
- Readings on Lyceum (LYCEUM)
Requirements:

Students will be required to write 4 papers (due dates are listed on the final page with the schedule of readings):

- two short 3-page papers on assigned topics (15% each).
- a mid-term paper (6 pages) on an assigned topic due at the midterm (30%)
- a final paper (8-10 pages) on a topic of your choice (40%)
- class participation (+/-10%)

B. We will create an installation of *The Collaborative Drawing Project: Drawings after Sol LeWitt*. The installation is tentatively scheduled for the November 3rd (location TBA). The goal of the project is threefold: to introduce students to conceptual art and chance procedures; to see the productive process of making an artwork from beginning to end; and to explore the types of productive constraints that materials and methods impose on the artistic expression.

- We will produce a series of Sol LeWitt style “location drawings” & “automatic drawings” as a group installation. Each drawing will consist of a set of instructions (e.g. snap a diagonal chalk line on a tangent to a large circle that divides the drawing unevenly along the horizontal) produced in a randomly assigned order.

  o **Location Drawings (8 x 20 feet):** Each location drawing is constructed from a set of 3-10 instructions that define a) the mark to be made & b) in some cases the body motion to be used to make that mark. We will generate the order of instructions, colors, and participating artists using a random number generator. Marks are made with soft pencils, oil crayons, & chalk lines using straight edges, line levels, & string compasses. Sheets of paper are constructed on site from 4 foot rolls and hung from 1x2s and picture hangers & large binder clips. Although the formal structure of each of these works is strictly defined by the instructions their realization is determined by uncoordinated (neither pre-determined nor jointly planned) sets of choices made by the individual participants in the productive process. The result is a set of formally identical, but perceptually distinct 8 x 20 foot abstract drawings.

  o **Automatic Drawings:** Automatic drawings are constructed from a small set of formally identical marks whose orientation and placement on the paper is determined in advance by a sequence generator. Each drawing is constructed from a set of rules for that define a pattern of overlapping marks. The form emerges from the pattern of rules that is pre-determined by the sequence generator.

  o **Computer Drawing:** If time & technology permits we will program a computer to continuously generate automatic drawings for the duration of the installation.

- We will meet during class time on November 3rd to create the installation.

D. We will visit Professor Rachel Boggia in the dance studios during the first week of December for a set of hands on lessons about choreography and the production of dance. Everyone is required to participate, so make sure to wear comfortable, loose fitting clothes like sweats for these class. More information about these exercises will follow as the semester unfolds.
Some Miscellaneous Notes and Guidelines:

Moral behavior is the grounds for, and the framework of, a healthy society. In this regard it is each of our responsibility as individuals within the community of our classroom to act responsibly. This includes following the rules and guidelines set out by Bates College for academic behavior. Plagiarism is a serious matter. It goes without saying that each of you is expected to do his or her own work and to cite EVERY text that is used to prepare a paper for this class. In general philosophy papers are NOT research papers. Your preparations for papers and presentations should focus on material from the syllabus, assigned supplemental readings, and class discussion.

I ask that you not use the internet for your research except as assigned in class.

The written assignments are designed to give you a chance to stretch your legs a bit while you learn about Philosophy of Art (and to give me a chance to assess your understanding of the material). Your job for each of the writing assignments is to offer a philosophical defense of your take on the issue at hand. However, this does not mean that they are free forums for opinions. Make sure that your discussions remain focused on the philosophical problems that surround the assigned question or topic.

There is some flexibility built in to the reading schedule so that we can spend more time on issues that are of particular interest to you. I will occasionally suggest supplementary for students who want to pursue particular issues beyond class discussion. I also reserve the right to modify the syllabus as needed to accommodate our interests as a group.

Finally, please come see me at the beginning of the semester to discuss athletic schedules or any accommodations you might need for the class work.
Assignments:

All written assignments are to be handed in electronically via the dropbox on Lyceum and in hard copy in class the day that they are due.

First Paper - Please write a 3 page (900 word) paper on one of the following topics. Your paper should be double-spaced in 12 point font with 1” margins. The purpose of this assignment is to demonstrate your understanding of definitions of art strategies for understanding the nature of art.

Paper Topic (1a): Define & evaluate Tolstoy’s formal and evaluative criteria of art. Is Collingwood’s discussion of art an improvement on this theory?

Paper Topic (1b): Define & evaluate Bell’s theory of significant form. What does it mean to say that this theory suffers from a false analogy to sensation?

Due Date: 09/22/10

Midterm Paper - Write a 6 page paper (1800 word) on one of two topics to be announced on the distribution date for the midterm. Your paper should be double-spaced in 12 point font with 1” margins. The purpose of this paper is twofold: a) evaluate a standard argument in the literature; and b) demonstrate that you can synthesize the material covered in the 1st half of the semester into a coherent position.

Topics Distributed: 10/01/10
Due Date: 10/13/10

Collaborative Drawing Project: Drawings after Sol LeWitt - We will meet at a location to be determined on November 3rd where we will construct a series of automatic drawings (see above). I hope that we will also be able to involve the larger Bates community in this project. I propose that we try to collectively decide on a set of additional times that we can invite folks from outside of the class to come make their mark.

Date: 11/03/10
Location: TBA

Third Paper Please write a 3 page (900 word) paper on one of the following topics. Your paper should be double-spaced in 12 point font with 1” margins. The purpose of this assignment is to evaluate your understanding of the material introduced after the midterm.

Topics Distributed: 11/10/10
Due Date: 11/19/10

Movement & Dance - We will meet with Rachel Boggia from the Dance Concentration in Theater and Rhetoric the first week of December (the first week back from Thanksgiving). Rachel will lead us through some exercises to teach us about movement and choreography. A central theme in this course is the idea that the meaning of an artwork is inextricably tied to the process of artistic production in its medium. The goal of these classes is to learn a little bit about what goes in choreography and dancing. We will experiment with movement so sure to wear comfortable clothes like sweats to this class!

I ask that you browse the work in two documentaries before we meet for our dance class. It is a big class so you should try to get to this early on in the semester. If everyone waits until the last minute there will not be time for everyone to see them. If there is sufficient interest I would be happy to meet outside of class to screen them some evening. The films are: Merce Cunningham: A Lifetime in Dance and Trish Brown, Early Works: 1966-1979

Date: 12/01/10 & 12/03/10
Location: TBA

Final Paper - Write an 8-10 page paper on a topic of your choosing. All topics must relate to course material from the syllabus. All topics must be cleared by me before the end of the first week of December.

Topic Meeting: Before 12/03/10
Due Date: End of the Final Exam Period (there is no final exam)
**SCHEDULE OF READINGS:** What follows is a provisional syllabus. This schedule may change, as may the readings within it, as a result of class interests and time constraints. Any changes will be announced in class prior to the date of the change of assignment. Also, importantly, I will let you know each day how to approach the readings for the next class, whether some readings are more important than others, and, occasionally, whether we will drop a reading from a session (it has happened). You can’t get this information if you are not in class.

**Topic 1: Definitions of Art**

**What is Philosophy of Art?**
Warburton  
*Art & Philosophy* *(AQ)*

**Form:**
Warburton  
*Significant Form* *(AQ)*

**Expressionism:**
Tolstoy  
*What Is Art?* *(LYCEUM)*  
Warburton  
*Expression of Emotion* *(AQ)*

**Anti-Essentialism, Institutional and Historicist Theories of Art:**
Weitz  
*The Role of Theory in Aesthetics* *(LO)*  
Warburton  
*Family Resemblances* *(AQ)*
Dickie  
*The New Institutional Theory of Art* *(LO)*  
Warburton  
*Institutional Contexts* *(AQ)*

**Topic 2: Aesthetics, Ideas, and Interpretation**
Walton  
*Categories of Art* *(LO)*  
Danto  
*Art and Meaning* *(LYCEUM)*
Danto  
*The Work of Art and the Historical Future* *(LYCEUM)*
Danto  
*The Artworld* *(LO)*

**Topic 3: Philosophy of the Arts**

**Conceptual Art:**
Greenberg  
*Modernist Painting* *(LYCEUM)*  
Lewitt  
*Paragraphs on Art* *(LYCEUM)*  
Irvin  
*The Ontological Diversity of Visual Artworks* *(LYCEUM)*

**Music:**
Davies  
*Philosophical Perspectives on Music’s Expressiveness* *(LYCEUM)*  
Kivy  
*Emotions in the Music* *(LYCEUM)*  
Robinson  
*The Expression and Arousal of Emotion in Music* *(LO)*

**Dance:**
Langer  
*Virtual Powers (excerpt)* *(LYCEUM)*  
Beardsley  
*What is Going on In Dance* *(LYCEUM)*  
Carroll and Banes  
*Working and Dancing* *(LYCEUM)*  
Witlheits and Vrana  
*Play It Again Sam*  
Krumhansel and Schenk  
*Can dance reflect … qualities of music*  
Dittrich et al  
*Perception of emotion from point light displays …in dance*

**Photography:**
Scruton  
*Photography & Representation* *(LO)*
Bibliography:

**Topic 1: Definitions of Art**

**Topic 2: Aesthetics & The Philosophy of Art**

**Topic 3: Philosophy of the Arts**
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